



# Indonesian Government and Churches Synergy with Digital Utilization to Accelerate Pandemic Recovery

Martina Novalina, Indria Samego, Lonato Hediando, Erastus Sabdono

<sup>1</sup> STT Ekumene Jakarta, Indonesia

`martina@sttekumene.ac.id`

**Abstract.** As the fourth most populous country in the world, Indonesia has suffered from high rise number of death and confirmed case of COVID-19 in 2021. The government has shown COVID-19 confirmed cases spikes about ten times more at mid July 2021. As a countermeasure Indonesian government has put forth some series of restriction and regulation for social activities as well towards religion activities. This quantitative research use paired t-test on 56 COVID-19 active cases data sample and shows that government synergy with churches with digital utilization positively impacted the decline of COVID-19 active cases. The churches have shown great compliance with government regulations and even providing pro-active support to cope with COVID-19 pandemic with digital utilization which leads to great reductions of confirmed cases and may provide further prevention of cases increase in the future. The church utilized their digital assets so they could accelerate public disease recovery and even the economy.

**Keywords:** church, digital, government, recovery, synergy

## 1 Introduction

This is not the first time in history for viruses that attacked respiratory systems becomes a global pandemic. The world has faced H1N1 or Spanish Flu on 1918 until 1920 and has taken death tolls for almost 100 million lives [1]. Right now, the world is struggling to flatten the curve for COVID-19 virus which has impacted many countries since 2019 and has taken death tolls for about 5 million lives [2]. Focusing towards Indonesia which have battled this virus also and has taken the initiatives of massive vaccination for its people. With an audacious target of at least 181.5 million people (about 67% of its population) can take the second vaccine shot, Indonesian government had to put many available resources at hand to push this “herd immunity” program into reality towards the end of 2022. Great goals like these are not easy to achieve as data tells us that up to June 2021 only 6.3% of targeted people had their second shot, this was about only 10% of their goals for 6 effective months since January 2021[3].

Knowing that a long road must be faced, Indonesia perhaps still needed to apply effective regulations and also efficient monitoring systems to cope up with COVID-

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S. E. Zaluchu et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the International Conference on Theology, Humanities and Christian Education 2022 (ICONTHCE 2022)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 802, [https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-160-9\\_11](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-160-9_11)

19 and as well running their economic routine. IMF predicted that advanced country will have an economic contraction about -5.5% until -15.4% (average of -10%) in COVID-19 pandemic while Indonesia as emerging market countries will have about -9.1% contraction in their GDP [4]. As economy is important but controlling the spread of the virus is also crucial, Indonesia good governance will play an important role for many sectors and speed up their goals of balancing economy and virus spread control. One of the most important aspects that Indonesia has is its cultural diversity. Naming all the diversity Indonesia has 1340 tribes, 340 ethnic groups, and 6 recognized religions [5]. Each of these tribes, ethnics, and religions are respected and are allowed to live accordingly towards their belief. These very diverse assets of Indonesia will show many cultural differences, which can either be strength or even weakness for the country if not managed properly by the country. Things like tolerance might emerge or on the other hand intolerance. In the perspective of coping up with pandemics, will this diversity can either speed up the nation recovery? Or on the other hand will it slow down the nation recovery?

Earlier publications by Djalante et al. also highlighted religious diversity that may act as a counter-productive factor when coping up with COVID-19 [6]. Government has put up some restrictions on religious meetings, forbidding some religious rituals and religious services that may be seen as an attack towards freedom of religiosity. Some cities in Indonesia like Kudus and Bangkalan is one example of counter-productive state towards pandemic recovery as there were still forced meetings and pilgrimage amongst Moslem community post Al-Eid Fitr that creates new COVID-19 clusters on June 2021 [7]. Churches also contribute in this counter-productive state towards pandemic recovery as new “choir cluster” emerges on June 2021 at Bantul, Yogyakarta [8]. Whereas in June 2021 Ministry of Internal Affairs Instruction No.13 Year 2021 Point 9(f) clearly states that red zone area was prohibited to have physical attendance on religious activities [9]. Kudus, Bangkalan, and Bantul were listed on red zone on June 2021, so it can be agreed that some religious communities didn't comply with regulations released by Ministry of Internal Affairs [10]. A paper written by Azhar and Azzahra also mentioned that communities might have failed to capture accurate information from the government concerning these regulations and restrictions to react on COVID-19 pandemics [11]. This misinformation might result in communities specifically cultural and religious body to react differently than expected and may produce outbreaks or worse situation. This is very counter-productive and will be the least Indonesian government want to expect. At the back side of the coin, supportive and cooperative religious and cultural bodies could be a far helpful part for pandemic recovery.

We will put our focus and attention on how Indonesian government manages its diversity assets especially on Christianity and churches. How churches react and support Indonesian government throughout the specified period of the pandemic? Does the government and churches work hand in hand and successfully achieve something notable in this pandemic recovery? Does Indonesia synergy with churches really matters to cope up with COVID-19 pandemic? This paper intended to answer all of these questions. The research method used will be rapid analysis based on factual media content and other reliable source of news also quantitative method of paired sample t-

test to summarize incline or decline of COVID-19 cases for the period of July-August 2021. In this way we may relate the impact of Indonesia good governance on churches and their reaction towards the incline or decline of COVID-19 cases within the specified period. This paper will also give recommendations and for churches and government synergy for future responses towards COVID-19 and also giving biblical and theological point of view for leaders for COVID-19 vaccination.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Regulations Versus Communication Gap

The period of July until August 2021 was chosen for this paper because this period shows an extraordinary increase of COVID-19 cases. Confirmed positive cases soars high up to 56.757 cases on July 15th. This is almost about 600% increase in cases from 1 month before on June 15th which is only 8.161 cases [12]. This was surprising enough for people. While regulations and instructions were on the roll by the government along June and early July, how come cases spikes so fast? Ministry of Health Regulation No. 18 released on June 15th, as well as Ministry of Religion Circular Letter No.13 released on June 16th, and there are about 13 more official regulation released to the public until July 11th from many ministries [13]. With these massive amounts of rules and regulations shouldn't it be effective enough for the nation to cope up with the virus spread? To answer these questions is to find the key of the uprise. Was it that the regulations cannot cater the problem at hand? Was it that the health and safety protocols are not enough to suppress the virus from spreading? Or perhaps failure in synergy between the people and government?

The highest contributor of the massive increase was on the area that are not implementing Restrictions on the Movement of Community Activities Level 4 [14]. These areas were amongst the populous and busy provinces in Indonesia: Jakarta, East Java, West Java, Yogyakarta, East Kalimantan, Riau, South Sulawesi, Central Kalimantan, and South Sumatra. This fact is alarming and disturbing at the same time because the highest contributing areas are actually given loosened regulation. Ministry of Internal Affairs Instruction No.15 released on July 2nd has set Jakarta as level 4, some areas on West Java at level 4 and East Java at level 3 [15]. On July 7th, the government has again updated that Jakarta, West Java, and East Java may apply Restrictions on the Micro Restrictions on Movement of Community Activities which grants green areas more freedom while still applying tight regulation on red and orange zone [16]. The government believed that the regulation can be loosened even for the red and orange zone such as restaurants and shopping center are opened with limited capacities also public transport are fully operational. This regulation was still strict and better economy-wise but looking at the confirmed case number, regulation was being loosened even though the case was rising. The pivot comes later on July 8th which has set the nation into emergency level and therefore implemented what called as Emergency Restrictions on Movement of Community Activities. Ministry of Internal Affairs Instruction No.18 that officially regulates this emergency restriction provides detailed

restriction even tighter than before. Essentials sector are now impacted and monitored closely. In only one day regulation can be updated and some areas changed level especially Jakarta, Bali, and Java Provinces [17].

The quick changing of regulations was understandable. But why with all the regulations the cases still high and rising? Perhaps Ministry of Internal Affairs Instruction No.16 may give us some answer. It was a small yet important update on previous rules which regulates sanctions for those who disobeys the rules given [18]. This update could indicate that the government noticed some elements of the public are not following current regulation and thus create ineffectiveness for pandemic recovery or even worsen the situation. A nation can set massive amounts of regulations, but if people won't follow then the goal behind those regulation will not come to fruition. Good regulations then are not a complete assurance of a solution. Without a good governance behind. Good regulations cannot make changes easily towards national situation. Good governance in public sector covers 5 important key aspects: democracy, transparency, accountability, the culture of law, fairness and equality [19]. The first aspect democracy means there should be participation, recognition of opinion differences and embodiment of public interest [20]. Wardhani et al. also gives us a deeper comprehension that good public governance must include eight key condition in which one of them was inclusivity [19]. Inclusivity and democracy are very close in term. Inclusivity here means that government should acknowledge the presence of a potentially wide range of civil society that represents the interest of wider society [21]. The failure behind the virus outbreaks on July 2021 is not within the regulation, but those who didn't buy in with the regulations.

UNICEF conducted a national observation report on March 2021 showing that only about 50% of people wear masks and keep a safe distance and about 25% wash their hands in public areas (up to 60% with public areas that provides hand washing facilities) [22]. The Faculty of Public Health of Universitas Indonesia concluded from their surveys that the public low awareness of doing "3M" (hand washing, wearing mask, and social distancing) also being a great factor that increases COVID-19 confirmed case besides the new Delta variant that has also entered Indonesia [23]. This data could convince us clearly that the government regulations and goals are not in synergy with people and community discipline to cope with COVID-19 pandemic. Vaccination on the other hand is not easy to implement as well. While government may have provided them for free, some elements of the public and communities might show resistance towards vaccination due to many factors. Ministry of National Development Planning of the Republic of Indonesia's surveys show that up to 35,2% of people doubted and even rejected the vaccine, which 8% of them rejected the vaccine for religious reasons, 13% don't believe in vaccine, and 12% are not sure that vaccination side effects are safe [24].

Policy makers are pacing with the speed of virus spread which sometime could create a gap of communication to the public. When the public fails to capture the right information or to receive accurate information about government policies, goals, and parameters they will tend to lose trust and even result in inappropriate reaction and disobedience [11]. Muhammad N Farid from Faculty of Public Health of Universitas Indonesia research team stated that the incline of cases in June is a proof that Emer-

agency Restrictions on the Movement of Community Activities regulation failed to change people behavior [23]. The enforced regulation may show government commitment to carefully manage and monitor on the implementation of their regulation throughout the public without discrimination. But through all of these regulations and enforcement, synergy from all elements of public might be essential to achieve national goals to cope with the pandemic situation.

## 2.2 Recovered by Synergy

From July to end of August 2021 we could roughly see a declining trend in COVID-19 confirmed cases. We have surfed all the regulations before but the trend was rising up to July 2021, and now the trend falls towards August. How can this be? There must be a change in some factors as we have explored before. When before a tight regulation alongside with bad discipline synergy with the public didn't proof effective, there was actually a change in how the government act their regulations and also a change in people attitude after the cases surge. A closer look at Jakarta as one of the biggest COVID-19 cases contributor, Anies Baswedan released Governor's Decree No. 996 on August 3rd that regulates market shoppers, restaurant and cafe consumers, and even religious houses and sites to oblige with vaccination [25]. This regulation comes in as an initiative from local officials rather than central government meaning that local government has started to see the pandemic as a very dangerous threat and in need of local quick action. In a lot more detail the regulation stated that vaccination is a must for every sector and places that draw people mass, including the very small food stall. Local authorities have included a lot of personal elements which is not implemented in regulations issued by central government before, adding even the smallest local element to urgently participate in this regulation. Inclusivity is starting to show inside this regulation.

As the regulations are started to be governed in city levels, people have started to see the commitment of the government and also the severity of the pandemic. The key in the declining trend of cases in Jakarta area is the discipline of all Jakarta citizens [26]. Johny G. Plate as the Minister of Communication and Information summarized the decline in factors related to democracy values of good governance saying that collaboration between organizations, communities, private sectors, and all individuals becoming the key factor of the decline on COVID-19 confirmed cases [27]. The synergy between government and all public elements creates a winning condition and supportive environment for the regulation to be acted upon and made it effective. These synergies are in form of both discipline and collaboration, people acknowledged and obeyed the regulations and also even providing initiative to further improve the situation. This inclusive energy that showed up as one of the values of good governance played a massive role towards the succession of government regulations against the pandemic situation.

Collaboration from religious communities such as church and religious organizations are much needed and essential factor. Research in Malaysia by Azlan et al. mentioned also that government mitigation measures will only be highly effective with cooperation and compliance of all society members (which includes religious com-

munities and organizations) [28]. The nation also needed religious leaders to provide theological argument on vaccination to suppress COVID-19 [24]. It made sense that religious leaders need to act supportive towards the regulation, for there are not few people that rejected the fact that perhaps COVID-19 existed and also questioning the vaccines validity. Both the decline of COVID-19 trend and the implementation of Governor's Decree No. 996 could also mean that most of religious communities are in compliance with vaccination and religious meeting regulations.

### 2.3 Churches Hasten Its Role

Specific for churches in Jakarta area, initiatives and voluntarily actions appeared for vaccination success. Christian School IPEKA together with Indonesian Chinese Church Fellowship (PGTI) and also Gereja Kristus Yesus (GKY) offered themselves to host vaccination in North Jakarta [29]. Gereja Kristen Pasundan (GKP) also offered themselves in collaboration with government as vaccination sites in South Jakarta also Gereja Santo Andreas in West Jakarta [30]. Bayu Samodro from Catholic Community Guidance of Ministry of Religion applauded that many churches and schools affiliated with churches that voluntarily supported vaccination program on August 3rd, 2021 [31]. Church and Christian schools hasten their publication for this vaccination using digital means. Along with Jakarta government these churches and Christian schools uses JAKI (*Jakarta Kini*) application for public above 12 years old to freely register [32]

BAPPENAS studies indicates that Indonesian people trust towards religious leaders remains high [24]. With leaders' endorsement on regulation compliance and supportive perspective on vaccination, church members will likely more comply and follow the vaccination programs. Churches leaders then have great power to convince the Christians on vaccination and compliance towards the regulations. To further accelerate the vaccination progress through leaders' influence, the church also using digital means such as social media and their own websites to deliver correct news and perception on vaccination [33]. With this way churches also shorten the communication gap between government expectation from regulation to the public.

Not only about health, but churches have economical roles also. Youth Community of Gereja Bethel Indonesia (GBI) Yogyakarta decided to utilize their church social media to promote the businesses of their church members [34]. Economics are severely impacted in COVID-19 pandemic and church can be one of the solutions that its members need to help make economy better for them. Gereja Pantekosta di Indonesia (GPdI) Elshaddai Wamena and GPdI Elroi Wamena also empowered their members by giving training to create their own independent businesses such as making food, tailoring, farming, carpentry and other practical businesses which can also be done online [35]. Churches may play a big role on eliminating poverty and even increasing the economic capacity of their members especially on this pandemic. To be noticed also that the spirit of entrepreneurship in the church might help their members during pandemic but church must not be trapped in being an entrepreneur and ignore their main function as a church [36]. Digitally connected tools and internet such as for transaction, online contribution and cashless payment are not a stranger anymore to the church as it is proven to bolster economic welfare and promote church's members wellbeing and businesses [37].

### 3 Method

How impactful is this government synergy with churches roles and initiatives towards suppressing COVID-19 cases? Does good governance specifically with democracy and inclusivity values makes a difference on coping up with COVID-19 cases? This paper will use Jakarta area as its research scope. The reason is that Jakarta has much media coverage and news updating on local regulations, public reactions, organizations initiatives and many more while other areas seemed to lack media coverage on their progress. It is not surprising since Jakarta is the capital city of Indonesia and almost all government officials are there so the media will spend much focus there. We are using COVID-19 confirmed cases data from Indonesia official COVID-19 website for most trustable and valid data.

The method for this research is by using paired sample t-test with a total of 56 data sample with 95% of confidence interval. The data will be split into two variables: the first variable is confirmed cases 28 days before August 3rd and the second variable will be confirmed cases 28 days after August 2nd. August 3rd picked due to the reason that local government are starting to put stricter local regulations [38] and also at this date the Ministry of Religion applauded that churches are taking initiatives as vaccination center for public [31]. By choosing August 3rd does not mean to generalize that all initiatives of the churches are starting on that date also about the synergy of the government. As we can see a lot of initiatives are actually coming earlier or even later but this is the most representative date for this research since both the government actions and also churches initiatives being recognized. This research uses 28 days before and after August 3rd in Jakarta as a fair parameter to see the changes before and after the synergy happened. Four weeks is certainly not too short to see the changes and it is not too long also considering this paper didn't include other factors that may also have contribution toward COVID-19 confirmed cases.

Normality test has been done prior doing paired sample t-test using Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test [39]. The test showed that both variables have two tailed significance more than 0,05 meaning that both variable data are distributed normally. From the test we have inferred that there is difference between two variables, proven with a two tailed significance lower than 0,05. Government synergy with churches initiatives really created impact towards COVID-19 confirmed cases in Jakarta. There is also strong positive correlation (0,71) between government synergy with churches initiatives towards COVID-19 confirmed cases. This correlation creates declining trend for COVID-19 in Jakarta from averagely 8117 cases per day to 1122 cases per day after the implementation. Religious and church influence are indeed impactful for Jakarta area to cope with pandemic situations. Supported with the wide array of digital utilization by the church like using online registration for vaccination, moving towards online services and ministry, and also social media influence. This synergy will not happen when both parties doesn't share the same goals and urgencies. Regulations in local area met with good initiatives of the public can make such difference. In this case we can clearly summarize that government inclusiveness with the public and churches proactive response being a strong factor to suppress the spread of the virus.

## 4 Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Christians and the Government

Christianity has long taught that element of public should abide and obey the government and their regulations as long as it didn't insult the name of God and put something that contradicted with the Word of God. In Gospel Luke 20:25 written, "He said to them, "Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's"" [40]. Jesus Christ told the spies that was sent to Him that people have to obey and serve their responsibility both to the government and to God the same. Even though at that time Israel are being held captive by the Roman empire and Jesus Christ was seen as the Messiah who will release Israel from any subjection including the Roman, Jesus wanted the people to obey (by paying taxes or what they ought to give) the current reigning government.

Romans 13:6-7 also says, "This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor" [41]. Christians should believe that by obeying the government and doing their duty as a good citizen that their live will also be in line with the Word of God. Paul as the author of the letters expected that Christians can be a model citizen and believed that God has placed the government for a purpose: to maintain public order and avenge wrongdoing [42]. Paul also stated in his letter, "For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer" [43]. And also, "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" [44]. It is just logical and practical that government will only be seen as enemy to those that broke the laws and seek to do evil things. And by doing good to the city, is also doing the general good that could foster supports from the government towards Christianity.

Christians therefore should believe that the government are placed by God to do His will, and the church has to submit to His will also via obeying the regulations of the government. Even though not all the government regulations are a winning solution for every individual, Christians should still hold the rules and support any government actions that put forward the good for many people. The prosperity of the city will also be the prosperity of the Christians as in Jeremiah 29:7 written, "Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper" [45]. So not only to obey, but to seek the prosperity of the city the Christians has been called. The recovery found in the proactive response of the church towards the government regulations then is biblical and follows the right point of view given by prophets and apostles of The Holy Bible. As this response shows that the churches are seeking for a better city, the scientific result and data could prove also that the city is prospering (with lower rate of COVID-19 cases). For the church doing God's will and spreading God's love can be



implemented by working together with local authorities to eliminate certain problems rather than to raise unnecessary conflict and contrary opinions to the public.

In 1 Peter 2:13-15 also encourage Christians to submit to all human authority and supreme rulers or to governors for that his goodness in submission can be a way to show to all the people that Christians can be a perfect role-model of living in current era [46]. In theological perspective, submitting and supporting the government for a good cause is godly and not only it will bring good things and prosperities for all people in the cities but to glorify the name of God as well by the action of the church. To support the government can also mean to love your neighbors, while the government wanted the good of many, the church could also bolster those goals [47]. Love your neighbors which is the greatest commandment along with loving God with all the heart, soul, and mind [48].

#### **4.2 Church Digital Utilization on Beliefs of Vaccination**

Studies from BAPPENAS showed that only 40% of people in Indonesia would take vaccines shot, 8% of them due to religious reason [24]. This is indeed a dire result. To achieve higher goals stated by Indonesian government the number of people that are not willing to take the vaccine shot need to be reduced. For the Christians this is also some serious matter to be discussed. Is the vaccine against the will of God? Is it perhaps some curse? Is it related to the lack of faith? Not few may question vaccination is effective and “good” to use as the best option available in this COVID-19 pandemic.

Research in the United States by Corcoran et al. showed that Christian nationalism are strongly related to anti-vaccine attitude [49]. Christian nationalism itself is mainly a belief that Christianity should be the source of all moral law, connected deeply to nativism, that the nation should be declared a Christian nation and highly rejecting science and all scientific arguments that maybe in parallel with Christianity [50]. Such beliefs could be a great hindrance for United States to achieve herd immunity. In Indonesia the same thing could happen if Christians believed that science is always the contradiction of faith, but is it so? The Bible shows that science (knowledge) and God is not a separate thing rather all knowledge is coming from God the creator. Psalm 94:10 says, “Does he who disciplines nations not punish? Does he who teaches mankind lack knowledge?” [51]. This verse clearly stated that God is the one who teaches mankind. In other word He allows mankind to evolve to the knowledge He had given from logical thoughts of mind and also empirical evidence human sees and conducted from the nature. In Moses era, God Himself gave inspiration, knowledge, and skills to Bezalel and Aholiab to make artistic designs and smithing, on weaving and engraving [52]. Whether it is practical skills or scientific knowledge are all given by God. He then also allows to certain degree for human to studies and understand the problems of their world and use their knowledge to find its solution [53]. Believing in science doesn’t mean that Christians doesn’t believe in God divine sovereignty on knowledge and standards, instead we acknowledge God’s greatness that gives mankind the wisdom and knowledge to carry out His plan for this world. Vaccination as progress of science might be God’s plan for His people to survive and live well in this pandemic

situation. Rejecting vaccination could also mean rejecting God's gift for humanity to cope with the pandemic.

Director General of Christian Community Guidance from ministry of Health agreed that COVID-19 Pandemic is not a curse, but a condition in which all of us need to face together [54]. Whether it is natural occurrence or human factor, we need to face it together with great faith in God. Proverbs 27:12 says, "The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty" [55]. As a Christian, we need to sense with faith and see with wisdom on what lies ahead, and if it is danger then we need to find solution and safe options for the goodness of many. The penalty relevant to this pandemic is of course getting sick or even death. The government then are the tools in the hand of God to protect His people from this creeping danger with vaccination as one of its best options. The church on the other hand should use any modern technology means to enhance their services and also vaccination progress. Internet of things, social media, big data, and other online media tools should be seen as facilities that God has given through human intellectual to bring goodness and acceleration towards church mission especially on recovery contribution in this post pandemic state [56].

## 5 Conclusion

By using paired sample t-test on 56 COVID-19 active cases data in Jakarta within the period of July to August 2021 we can conclude that government synergy on churches with digital utilization positively affect the reduction of COVID-19 active cases. This synergy matters to accelerate pandemic recovery due to high public trust to religious leaders while church digital utilization also hastened their progress to shorten the communication gap between the government and to the public. Churches should perceive technology as a means that God has graced them through human intellectual to help its mission effectively mainly for acceleration of pandemic recovery.

As a supporting evidence and proven analytical resources for the government and the church that a collaboration between them using digital assets is an effective strategy measure for national pandemic recovery. Also, as a further consideration for the church to proactively explore digitalized service and solutions for future improvement.

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